

Duxbury's Winter Recreation, Then and Now Part II

By THE REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

"Release from tension and anxiety and frustration, that's it," said Frank LeSueur, our recreation director, as he came into the office for our interview. Frank and his able assistant, Martha MacFarland, took time out of a busy schedule to talk to me and I learned many new things, not without, however, firing a salvo I felt was straight from the ranks of the Duxbury elderly contingent:

"Well, Frank," I began, "some oldtimers like myself around town think that yours is a dispensable department; we don't really need it. People should take a walk or chop wood if they want exercise. They should go to a show or jog or swim if and as they wish without this overblown blow on the taxpayers' pocketbook you represent."

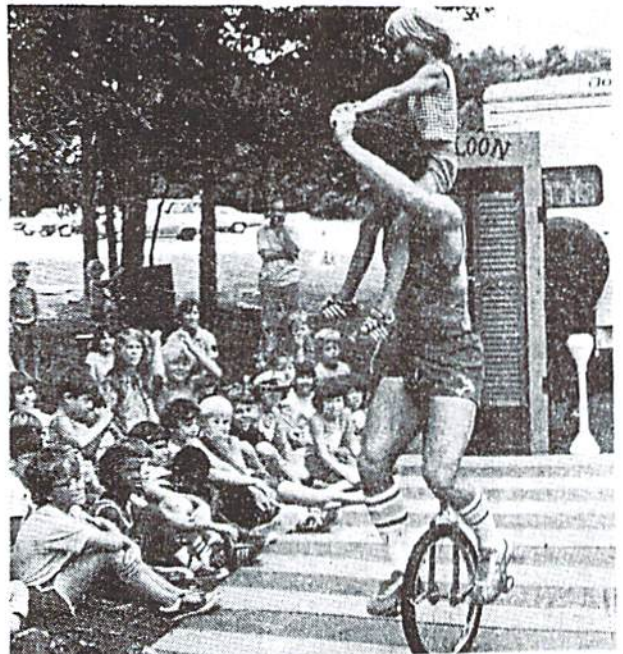
Frank came back gently and forcefully and in his amiable way led me to see the necessity of the department for the welfare of the townspeople. He told me the work got its inception when the town meeting in 1949 set up a commission under Jerry Dewing to see what the needs were. Then in 1964, after 15 years of careful study and endless hearings, its first full-time director was called (Ernest Gowen) followed in 1971 by another (Raymond Ellison) and then himself in 1976.

Frank, as his gentle accent betrays, was born in England and grew up there, becoming an outstanding soccer player (maybe this accounts for our young people's soccer enthusiasm), came to the U.S. in 1957 and took his degree in recreation administration at Springfield College in 1962. His overall goal is to provide interesting activities to "youngsters of all ages," from kindergarten to senior citizens. I asked about school and service club programs. "These are carefully set so there is no duplication," he said. I could see that this program came into use where others fell short, so that no one who wants to be involved is left out.

This past year over 115 programs were sponsored by this department, including 76% of all senior programs in town as well. Coaches, special skilled teachers, volunteers on part time numbered 425. Frank could not have been more grateful in his recital of this last figure, saying it is this vast reservoir of helpers that really makes the program succeed.

The records that he and Martha handed me were a convincing witness to the great job that is done in this area. And Duxbury's concern for citizen recreation has a long history beginning as far back as 1900 and after when we purchased Train Field and built a bandstand for town celebrations. In 1944 the Old Cove was given a face-lifting to make it attractive for bathers. The Old Town Hall, used for town meetings when I was a lad, was turned into a recreation and leisure time workshop area by vote of town meeting. Later on it was completely renovated to what it is today by the town meeting of March 12, 1955, at a price of \$8,500. The Tarkiln school complex was also remodeled into a recreation center in 1953 and in 1956, with the help of the Kiwanis club, a life guard tower was purchased and set up on Duxbury Beach with a certified schedule of water surveillance.

Then in 1964 a committee of 7 citizens was appointed by the selectmen to coordinate recreational activities and secure the services of a trained recreational director. The story continues from here as

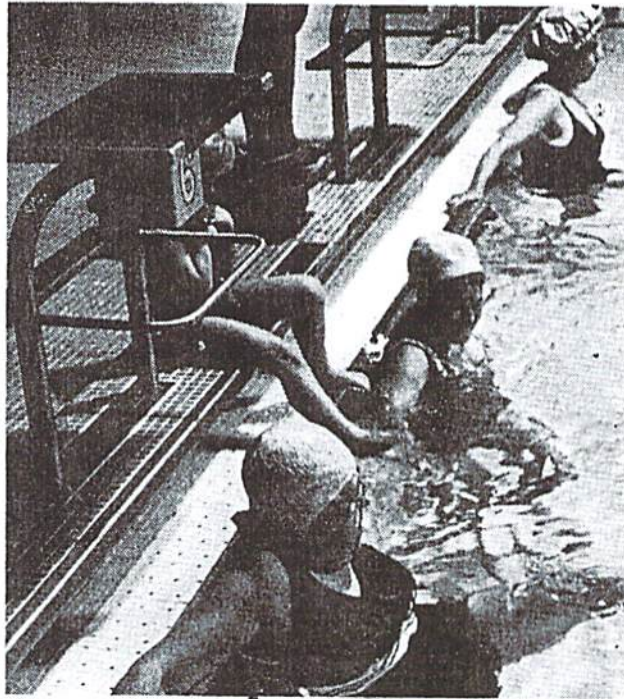


Summer playground with a visiting professional troupe.

most of us know, with the acquisition of playgrounds, parks and tennis courts throughout the town. Programs at these locations are set up by the Rec Department, with facility maintenance by the Department of Lands and Natural Resources under the direction of Bradford Martin.

The most ambitious winter program is, of course, the Percy Walker Pool. Martha handed me the roster of pool events that looked like the train schedule of the old Pennsylvania Railroad. Swimming lessons for the young, practice sessions for the swimming teams, leisure use of the pool for senior citizens, all carefully dovetailed so the pool has a maximum use. Of course nothing like this existed in our day. It is a great tribute to the town that such a facility is available. Some feel that the acquisition of this pool was the greatest social and physical fitness event in recent years.

The pool, the bus trips for senior citizens, various other activities for Duxbury's people, represent an exhaustive list of possible endeavors for our citizens.



Adult lessons at pool.

The operating principle is that we can do more and enjoy more if they are done in an organized way, and cut costs at the same time. Any group of citizens who want to engage in any kind of useful occupation may come to the department and receive assistance in organization and management and possible equipment if it is available. I was surprised to see these opportunities for Duxbury's people: tax assistance, assault and rape prevention, ballet, karate, martial arts clinic and yoga, among a host of others.

There is no doubt that this department is doing an essential job. I came to this report as a skeptic, and I left with a real conviction of its importance to the quality of life of our town.

The office was humming with activity, with callers seeking help (although it was a near-zero day in mid-week) -- the phone ringing, people coming and going. It is an enterprise well worth the taxpayers' tab, and this year, if Frank's plans succeed, it will be at least 80% self-supporting from the fees charged for services.

I could see my time was running out and my space for this report. I wanted to pick Frank and Martha's brains as to the new bikeway project and how that will fit into the Rec Department's program as it undoubtedly will. I wanted to ask about the future development of North Hill, with its great steep hillsides, ideal for skiing and the plans for celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society in 1983 and how its members could signify this event. Wouldn't a refurbishing of North Hill as a total recreation center be an appropriate project? What else does Duxbury need that the Society could do for its celebration? I feel sure Bud Hutton, the society's new president, would be glad to hear any and all suggestions. These things I wanted to ask about, but perhaps they can wait 'til another day.